

**Fire Fighter 1<sup>st</sup> Class:  
Meeting the Needs of the Milwaukee Fire Department**

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

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An applied research project submitted to the national Fire Academy  
as part of the Executive Officer Program

July 1999

## ABSTRACT

The Milwaukee Fire Department has a proven record of service to the community. Once an agency concerned only with fire protection, it has grown to provide all aspects of fire protection, emergency medical services, hazardous materials mitigation, urban search and rescue and community based fire education programs. Even though the department's roles and responsibilities have grown dramatically, there has not been a corresponding growth in the number of personnel employed by the Milwaukee Fire Department.

To accomplish much more with the same amount of personnel and monetary resources, a majority of the needed training for these varied department endeavors must be done on duty. A problem surfaces when an officer or driver must leave their assigned fire station due to department commitments such as individual specialized training or public education assignments. When this occurs, as it does with ever increasing regularity, a member of the fire fighter rank is needed to volunteer for an uncompensated, temporary assignment to a promoted person's position. With ever increasing regularity, the needed volunteers are not forthcoming.

The problem facing the Milwaukee Fire Department is a lack of willing volunteers to act out of title when vacancies occur in promoted ranks. The purpose of this research was to evaluate possible solutions to meet this operational challenge. An evaluative research methodology was used to answer the following questions.

1. Can the implementation of hourly pay for acting assignments increase the number of volunteers for these positions?
2. Would a change in the organizational structure decrease the need for employees to act out title?

3. Should the position of fire fighter undergo a job redesign?

The results of this research illustrated several different approaches to overcome daily operational challenges. A commonality of this type of problem was found within many different fire departments. Various agencies had used different means to solve similar problems with varying levels of success.

The recommended course of action was to undertake a redesign of the position of fire fighter, in effect creating a new position on the Milwaukee Fire Department of "Fire Fighter 1st Class". This position will have clearly defined roles as well as added responsibilities in exchange for added monetary compensation for those in this new rank.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Milwaukee Fire Department (MFD) is typical for a United States fire service organization. It is considered a quasi-military organization, with a well-defined rank structure ranging from the entry-level position of firefighter to the highest rank of Chief Engineer. The City of Milwaukee, Wisconsin is located in the Midwest area of the United States, approximately 90 miles north of Chicago. The 1,062 members of the fire department, serving a population of over 600,000 inhabitants, offer a full range of protective services to the community, including fire protection and prevention, emergency medical services, and a full complement of specialized services including hazardous material mitigation, dive rescue and all forms of technical rescue (Milwaukee Fire and Police Commission, 1997).

The basic unit of the department is the engine or ladder company. These fire fighting companies have a daily staffing of a company officer, a driver, and either three or four fire fighters (Milwaukee Fire Department, 1996). Company staffing is never allowed to be less than four personnel. Because of the increasing number of daily activities faced by members of the Milwaukee Fire Department there is high probability that for a portion of their workday a company officer or apparatus driver could be assigned at a different location than his or her normally assigned fire station. At these times, a person in the firefighter rank will voluntarily assume the duties of the absent officer or driver. In recent years, this reassigning of personnel has become a greater logistical and managerial problem. There are fewer individuals that are willing to volunteer for these uncompensated, temporary assignments. This situation is causing operational difficulties on an ever-increasing basis.

Because these assignments are for the most part voluntary, there is little a battalion chief can do to compel a department member to undertake the duties of a person of a higher rank. When assignments such as these are short term, there is no monetary compensation for the person acting out of rank (Labor Contract, 1996). There are also no real requirements for a fire fighter to perform these duties if it is not an “emergency” situation (Milwaukee Fire Department Rule Book, 1993). Often times, those willing to take these short-term assignments are often members with the least seniority and experience. Because of this, the training level of those personnel who will act out of title is less than desirable for a driver or company officer, although there is a minimum experience level one must have to take a temporary assignment.

There is a popular thought among senior staff members of the Milwaukee Fire Department that if the position of fire fighter were to be expanded to include a position that would be required, by job description and compensation, to take all temporary positions at a higher rank when needed by the department, many of the typical problems would be solved. This type of job enlargement is the horizontal expansion of a job, or an increase in job scope. Job scope is the number of different tasks required in a job and the frequency with which the job cycle is repeated (Robbins, 1997). Furthermore, if jobs are properly designed, performance in line with job descriptions will result in those actions that will allow the organization to achieve its goals (Tansik and Elliot, 1981). Others have suggested that simply paying the individual a premium for all time acting out of title would solve the problem. In any case, the management of the Milwaukee Fire Department must come up with a workable solution to this sometimes crippling problem, a problem of having willing and able volunteers to act out of title when vacancies occur in the promoted ranks.

The purpose of this research project was to evaluate possible solutions for this managerial challenge, meeting both the needs of the Milwaukee Fire Department administration and the members of the labor union. This research project employed an evaluative research methodology to answer the following questions.

1. Can the implementation of hourly pay for acting assignments increase the number volunteers for these positions?
2. Would a change in the organizational structure decrease the need for employees to act out of title?
3. Should the position of fire fighter undergo a job redesign?

The procedures used to complete this research project included a literature review of fire service periodicals, textbooks and past research projects, a review of Milwaukee Fire Department rules, regulations and labor contracts, and study of managerial textbooks.

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Milwaukee Fire Department is an organization that has taken on a wide variety of additional tasks during the last decade. The need for continuous specialized training is a de-facto job requirement for many of the personnel that engage in any of the department's specialized teams or public education endeavors. Not only the training, but also the actual performance of

the learned capabilities often required a person to be away from their normally assigned post. Often times, the people that are most involved in additional fire department related activities are assigned to the promoted positions of company officer or apparatus driver. In their absence, someone must assume the responsibilities.

If there are no available volunteers in the person's firehouse, a battalion wide search must be conducted for a willing volunteer. Often, this leads to a delay in the person leaving for training or other similar assignments, subsequently arriving late for their scheduled session. If this occurs interdepartmentally, the effect is having a training session starting at a later time. This leads to interrupted lesson plans, a lack of continuity in the training and a poor learning atmosphere. If the person were to arrive late for an external fire department appointment, a poor public image of the member and the department can occur. For the person that has an assignment outside of their firehouse, these delays lead to frustration and anger. Anger toward the member who will not help out for the "good of the department", and anger toward the department for not doing anything to alleviate the problems that are experienced by those employees that are willing to take on additional duties and studies.

There is also a morale factor for the person that might take a temporary assignment. Because there is no monetary compensation, some employees hold the opinion that they are being used as a form of free labor for the Milwaukee Fire Department. At times, there is also ridicule directed at the people that will volunteer for these assignments by those that will not. Because of the labor contract, a full paid fire fighter receives the same compensation in either case. This leads to internal friction between members of the same rank, within the same bargaining unit, on the same fire department. In many cases, this frustration is redirected toward management.



Because of the frequency of these assignments, many employees that would have normally taken the steps to be qualified as a temporary officer or driver are now refusing to do so. This has the impact of a poorer level of training in the firefighter ranks. Again, because there is no monetary incentive to do so, less and less members are taking what was once the traditional role of helping out the organization. Much like the police department members in New South Wales (Chan, 1996), the members of the Milwaukee Fire Department are identifying now with the job, but not the organization.

This problem is not isolated to any one of the three shifts that the members are assigned, nor is it confined to any one of the six battalions that comprise the fire fighting division of the Milwaukee Fire Department. This problem is systemic within the Milwaukee Fire Department, particularly at the rank of fire fighter.

The complaints about the present situation have been numerous and multi-directional. From one side, the battalion chiefs complain that they do not have enough qualified volunteers to enable them to effectively manage the day to day operations of their respective battalion. Even when volunteers are found, if they are often found at a different firehouse from the one that is need of their services. There are logistical difficulties that are encountered when transportation has to be arranged for individual members, and further liability concerns if a department member were to use their own personal vehicle for transportation to another firehouse after their normal workday has started.

From the rank of fire fighter, they complain about not getting paid to perform a higher-ranking position and not receiving compensation for taking on much greater responsibilities than their normally assigned position. By some, a more troublesome situation is the lack of proper training for the positions that they are assuming. There are some members who might be willing

to take on the responsibilities of these temporary assignments even without compensation, but are uncomfortable in their own ability to perform at a promoted level, even if it is a temporary situation.

It makes little difference from which direction the complaints come from. The lack of a compensation for temporary assignments on the Milwaukee Fire Department causes managerial difficulties during the daily operations of the department. At present time, the problems are small and manageable with some effort on the battalion chief's part and with cooperation of a willing workforce. This could change, quickly and dramatically. If an entire battalion's complement of fire fighters would all refuse to take any acting out of title assignments, it would cause a cessation of on-duty training or the cancellation of compensatory time personal leave. In either case, it would have an adverse effect on department performance and employee morale. The problem has been identified. Widening of the job scope for fire fighter or monetary compensation could create solution to the challenge of the situation. This problem is somewhat benign at present time, but swift, sure action will prevent it from festering into a malignant cancer within the Milwaukee Fire Department. For the future operational well being of the department, the time to act is now.

### **Identifying Symptoms of the Problems**

Some symptoms of the problem have been in existence for decades, but the manifestation of the problem is a fairly recent phenomenon. Part of the problem is caused by the willingness of many department members to do more than the minimum job requirements. It is this type of

volunteerism that is encouraged by the department, and every attempt should be made to remove any barriers that might hinder a person from improving their job skills. The reluctance or inability of a firefighter to act out of title is an easily identifiable barrier to a person of higher rank participating in on-duty activities that have a positive effect on the person or bring a positive result to the Milwaukee Fire Department.

The following symptoms relating to the problem include:

- Battalion chiefs complaining about inefficient time management because of repeated staffing concerns.
- Low morale due to all employees receiving the same pay, even those employees that are most productive.
- Time wasted because of employees having to be transported to other firehouses.
- Union complaints of an employee doing the work of a promoted position for no additional compensation.
- Liability concerns by employees using their private vehicle for transportation while on duty.
- Fire fighters refusing to act out of title.
- A reluctance to act out of title due to a perceived lack of training.
- A loss of the teamwork concept when an employee from another fire house is assigned to act out of title.

This list is neither complete nor exhaustive. The relatively small matter of assuming another position for a few hours is taking on monumental proportions within the Milwaukee Fire Department. By separating the symptoms from the actual problem will enable this author to make a clear distinction and a true definition of the actual problem. It is with this succinct definition of the problem that an effective solution can be found and implemented.

### **Defining the Specific Problem**

There is a myriad of managerial issues that underlie the true problem. Is the inability to have an employee that is willing to volunteer for an uncompensated, temporary position an issue of motivation or professionalism? When there are logistical staffing problems, is this an issue of human resource management or team building? Is there a need for organizational change or is there more strategic planning needed? The answer to all of these questions is yes. The question that is in most dire need of an answer is the one that encompasses all of the previous elements, and when it is correctly answered, will give solutions to all of the previous queries.

It is the feeling of some that the actual problem is one of job design. The current job description of the rank of fire fighter does not contain clear language that addresses the present daily needs of the Milwaukee Fire Department, and the current contract does not have an award system in place for those employees at the fire fighter rank that are most productive. By redefining the position of fire fighter in terms of a higher level of performance would benefit both the department and the employee who meets the requirements of the position and would also allow differing levels of compensation for those that perform additional duties.

As part of the job description, this new level of fire fighter would be required to act out of title when needed. To be effective, there would have to be a minimum training level of these employees to function efficiently as either temporary drivers or company officers. It is anticipated that a large percentage of the present fire fighter rank would apply themselves to attain this new level if the monetary compensation was determined to be adequate. This additional cost would be offset by the increase in productivity and decrease of personnel problems and issues of morale.

### **Analyzing the Underlying Causes of the Problem**

One of the first causes is the commitment by the Milwaukee Fire Department to maintaining a minimum level of four personnel on any individual fire company. This level has been determined to be the lowest level of staffing that will still maintain a safe working environment while performing within the standard operating procedures and guidelines of the Milwaukee Fire Department. The first concern of the management of the Milwaukee Fire Department is the safety of all personnel. This level of care for the employees, who are already working in a very hazardous occupation, will not be compromised further by reducing staffing levels to less than four people per apparatus. Because of this, it is often a necessity to move people around a battalion to maintain this minimum staffing.

The frequency of an individual leaving their respective firehouse on an individual basis was once a rarity. In today's environment, one consisting of increased training, public education

and greater access to compensatory off time, it has become the rule rather than the exception.

With this acknowledgement of these occurrences, it is required to implement a solution.

With the increased need for drivers and company officers to be away from their assigned firehouse came a corresponding request by the labor union to compensate individuals that would act out of rank. Some members will not act without monetary return and it could be only a matter of time when the union will take a more confrontational stand against what was once normal practice.

A major cause of the problem is the actual job description for the rank of fire fighter. The job description states that may be detailed to perform acting assignments of company officer and driver on a voluntary basis. (Milwaukee Fire Department, 1993). The labor contract is also a barrier to successful solutions, prohibiting the payment of any acting pay if the assignment is for a period of time less than an entire shift (Labor Contract, 1996). Additional standard operating procedures, orders, and department notices emphasize that payment for acting out of assigned title will only be made if the employee is assigned at a higher rank for an entire shift.

The questions pertaining to employee pay, organizational restructure and job design must be answered to solve this problem. This research project addresses those questions, and was completed using the applied research guidelines of the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. The problem researched by this project relates to Phase III: Implementation of the Change Management Model as outlined in the course "Strategic Management of Change". Phase III was designed as a guide for change implementation by guiding managers through the proper tasks that will ensure success in the changes being made. It is thought that the

recommended solution would improve the performance of the Milwaukee Fire Department and serve as a guide to other fire department facing similar challenges.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The awareness of a need is the first step of the process of a job design (Lansbury, 1980). As a senior member of the management staff of the Milwaukee Fire Department, this author has first hand knowledge of the daily problems faced by those who have the command responsibility for balancing and maintaining adequate staffing levels of any one of the department's six fire fighting battalions. A battalion chief has managerial responsibility for up to nine individual fire fighting companies, with each company consisting of a officer, a driver, and either two or three fire fighters working a twenty-four hour work shift. During the normal workday, any one of the company members might be required to leave their assigned quarters for purposes of training, public education assignments, department committee assignments or compensatory personal leave. It is the assigned duty of the battalion chief to maintain operational balance and readiness for those companies under his or her command, being aware of a minimum staff level of four personnel per company. Because of increased individual training and the greater use of compensatory personal time off, at times this balance is difficult. At other times it is close to impossible.

To exacerbate the situation, there has been a recent reluctance for employees in the fire fighting rank to volunteer to take temporary, short-term assignment at a rank higher than the one

normally assigned. At times, this causes difficulties when a driver or company officer has need to be away from their assigned position. If there is no one willing to “act out of title” in a particular firehouse, it is incumbent for the battalion chief to find someone that is willing, within the battalion, to take this very temporary assignment.

The traditional willingness of an employee to help the department in time of staffing needs has lessened. Public sector protection employees still relate to the job, but not to the organization (Chan, 1996). To overcome this trend, the job itself must be properly designed to bring an employee's performance in line with the specific job description, resulting in actions that will allow the organization achieve its goals (Tansik and Elliot, 1981).

The problem facing the Milwaukee Fire Department is witnessed in other departments. The Bellevue Fire Department currently utilizes acting officers to fill in when full-time officers are not assigned to duty because of leaves or special assignments. In Bellevue, when the acting officers are detailed into these positions, the same authority and responsibility goes with this assignment as the regularly assigned officer (Ganz, 1997). There was found a commonality to Milwaukee's situation in many areas of the country.

An incentive pay plan was supported in Fort Worth, Texas, with three qualifying items. First, the incentive must be large enough, you must target those to be motivated, and incentives should be linked to training, acquired certifications, or job performance (Ray, 1996). Ray further states that money can be used as a motivator, and that if a person feels his efforts are unappreciated, money becomes an important symbol.

Other research had similar findings. In Colorado, a system of pay for performance had to meet four basic criteria. First, it had to effectively differentiate and reward individuals on the basis of their performance or relative value to the organization. Second, it had to maintain pay



equity within the department and among neighboring departments. Third, the new pay system had to be linked to the long-term goals and objectives of the department. Finally, the new system had to provide a guide to employees to formulate their career development plans (Montoya, 1996).

Gaines (1994) states that one of the future challenges facing fire service managers will be retention and productivity of firefighters. Individuals who are willing to make the change should be rewarded in a way that will motivate them to continue. Those who are not willing to make change should be encouraged, but not coddled, into making the change.

As with many literature reviews, over time there appears a common theme. This literature review was no different. From coast to coast, a problem of getting fire service employees to act out of title was found in many departments. To face this challenge, most departments used motivational factors to improve job performance. There was a combination of monetary incentives and job reclassifications or redesigns. The information and knowledge gained from this literature review will enable the Milwaukee Fire Department to meet its daily operational needs in a more effective manner.

## **PROCEDURES**

An evaluative research methodology was used to examine the challenges and the steps that are needed to be taken to improve the daily operational capabilities of the Milwaukee Fire Department. The National Fire Academy's Learning Resource Center was accessed during January 1999 to review salient material relating to job classification, job design, incentive pay

and temporary assignments. Material included Executive Fire Officer research papers, textbooks relating to job design and fire service periodical articles that pertained to temporary promotions and acting assignments.

This author also had the unique experience of participating in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Fire Authorities Council Executive Development Course, held in Manly, New South Wales during March 1999. This experience allowed this author to realize that many problems truly are global problems, but so are the solutions. In addition to the interaction with fire service executives from Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom, the library of the Australian Institute of Police Management was also used for research.

In addition, all applicable rules and regulations of the Milwaukee Fire Department were reviewed for impact on the subject matter, as was the labor agreement between the Milwaukee Fire Department and Local 215, International Association of Fire Fighters. Any solution must be planned and implemented with a spirit of cooperation between all involved parties.

The procedures used mirrored the Change Management Model of the National Fire Academy, as presented by Dr. Calvin Posner during the Strategic Management of Change course taught during January 1999. While the importance of the analysis and planning steps are understood, this research concentrated on the procedures for successful implementation of a change within the Milwaukee Fire Department. It is also understood that any plan implementation must be followed by continued evaluation to see if the goals and objectives of the department are being met.

Some limitations must be noted. This research, while extensive, was not exhaustive. In addition, short and long-term evaluation of changes made in other departments was not available. The research material did indicate positive gains with employee incentives and job redesign, but

only further future study will clearly show if these changes have had successful institutionalization.

## **RESULTS**

The Milwaukee Fire Department has recognized a daily operational need for qualified individuals from the fire fighter rank to be available for temporary assignments as either a company officer or driver. This situation is caused by members of these two promoted ranks being away from their normally assigned firehouse during the performance of their assigned duties, or because of short-term personal leave. This operational deficiency is a normal situation for the Milwaukee Fire Department, and the typical daily assignment of 284 on-duty personnel allows for up to 36 members to be temporarily away from their normal assignment without jeopardizing the minimum strength of four personnel staffing any individual fire fighting company. It is a requirement that someone assume the promoted role in the absence of either company officer or driver during these situations.

The Milwaukee Fire Department job description for fire fighter clearly defines the member's duty during these occurrences. The fire fighter may be detailed to perform acting assignments of company officer or driver, if qualified, on a voluntary basis (Milwaukee Fire Department, 1993). It is up to the individual member to decide if he or she wants to take this temporary, non compensated assignment. With increasingly regularity, the answer is no. The problem is not going to go away. Because of ever increasing duties and commitments, the

practice of members leaving their assigned quarters will continue. How then can the Milwaukee Fire Department insure that there will always be willing fire fighters to take these assignments?

The answer to that question had three possible solutions. They are as follows:

- Hourly pay for all acting assignments
- Change the organizational structure
- Job redesign to include acting duties for those in the fire fighter rank

### **Evaluating Alternative Solutions**

On the surface, the first research question pertaining to hourly pay for all assignments seems to be an easily implemented solution. There are underlying negatives that should be of concern when determining the value this alternative. First, the labor agreement between Local 215, International Association of Fire Fighters (Union) and the Milwaukee Fire Department is clear in the language prohibiting this course of action. Article 19 of the contract relating to fire company and battalion staffing states that compensation for working in a temporary promoted position shall be provided only if the employee so assigned serves for the full twenty-four hour work shift (Labor Contract, 1996). Therefore, any temporary assignments that would be of only a few hours in duration, which is generally the case, could not be compensated without a change in this very specific contract article.

To change this language would require renegotiating the contract. Presently, union members receive compensation when acting out of title in the amounts of \$11.00 if assigned as a driver and \$17.00 if assigned as an officer. These amounts are for an entire twenty-four hour shift. If pro-rated to a few hours, the small amount of additional pay would probably not be enough incentive for an employee to take assignments when offered, even if the contract was modified to allow such practices. In addition, the Milwaukee Fire Department has a payroll system that is primarily manual in nature, especially at the firehouse level. The present payroll accounting software does not allow acting out of title assignment compensation to be recognized if less than an entire work shift. Changing this would require extensive programming changes.

This solution has some operational and strategic compatibility, but little cultural compatibility and resourceability.

The second research question addresses a change in the organizational structure. Although this option does not seem viable at the present time, this solution should not be passed off lightly as being unworkable. Organizational structures should not be so inflexible as to not permit or accept change, even if of great magnitude and impact on the structure. Radical restructuring has been accomplished with success in the Queensland (Australia) Fire and Rescue Authority. The Chief Executive Officer of Queensland, Wayne Hartley, stated the final product of this redesign was a much flatter organization that led a more efficient operation (Personal Communication, March 22 -23, 1999). This is something the Milwaukee Fire Department could research, but a change of this significance would require extensive strategic planning and analysis. The need for solutions addressing the department's present operational challenges are more immediate.

The need for total organizational restructuring could also be questioned. The present rank structure is relatively flat in its present state. In order from the top, the chief and his assistant are at one level, followed in descending order deputy chiefs, battalion chiefs, company officers, and finally drivers and fire fighters. It is felt that drivers and fire fighters could be banded together as neither have any supervisory or command functions. As one can see, there are only five distinct levels from top to bottom, representing an already flat organization. Further reduction in levels might be unwarranted.

The concept of workplace teams would also not appear to be viable. Daily operations in the firehouse include the necessity of staffing documentation, report writing and command at emergency situations. The bottom line is someone must be designated to be in charge. Whoever that may be would undoubtedly expect compensation for these additional duties and responsibilities.

This solution does have political acceptability from senior staff members, but would have detractors from lower ranks and outside the organization. There would also be a strategic acceptability, but would be somewhat operationally disadvantaged due to the immediacy of the needed solution.

The final question asks about a job redesign of the fire fighter position. Making acting out of title a condition of employment and job description would take away the option for an employee to refuse acting assignments when offered. By creating the position of Fire Fighter 1st Class, it would enable the battalion chief to easily identify those employees that are in this particular category and assign them as needed within the battalion. With a pool of employees holding the rank of Fire Fighter 1st Class, normal assignments could be made to strategically

locate these members to insure having at least one in every fire house on any given day. This would allow drivers and company officers to leave for special assignments without having to wait for a volunteer to arrive from another location, and to also increase the concept of continuity of command by using members that are assigned to that particular firehouse, and thereby familiar with both the company members and the hazards and conditions of the immediate response area.

There are negatives to this solution. The contract will also have to be reworded to reflect this new position. This change is made somewhat easier as an addendum to the present labor agreement because any increased compensation can just be added as an individual side agreement, without changing any present contract language as discussed in the first alternative solution.

This solution has political, strategic and operational acceptability. The improvement of operations would make resourceability more easily available. Cultural acceptability might be a problem, but could be overcome with effective implementation.

## **DISCUSSION**

The best solution for the Milwaukee Fire Department to address the problem of having a sufficient number of fire fighters to volunteer to act out of title is the job redesign of the rank of fire fighter. This redesign, or the third research question, has the greatest acceptability factors and the best ability to address the immediacy of the problem. Most of all, it is a workable solution that will have acceptance by the majority of the internal customers, especially those most effected by this organizational change.

By adding the new designation of “Fire Fighter 1st Class” to the fire fighter job description will address the many symptoms of the problem and also eliminate the causal factors that were the actual genesis of the challenges faced during the daily operations of the Milwaukee Fire Department. This solution is similar to the rank of “Senior Fire Fighter” found in the Melbourne (Australia) Fire Brigade (Ken Brown, personal communication, March 17, 1999). It addresses the need for qualified individuals to be available to assume the responsibilities of a promoted position in their own firehouse. By making this a condition of rank, and to also compensate the employee for these added responsibilities, eliminates the need to find a willing volunteer. It will be in their job description, they will be paid a monetary incentive to assume this new rank designation, and they will possibly be required to assume temporary positions of either driver or company officer on an occasional basis. The employee will be receiving greater compensation from the department and the department can expect more from the employee. If you pay for performance, you get performance (Leboeuf, 1985).

By having an employee that can be expected to act out of title as a condition of employment eliminates the many negative symptoms manifested by this problem. Symptoms eliminated include:

- Battalion chiefs will have a readily available pool of Fire Fighter 1st Class employee to fill operational needs. Time management is improved by no longer having to search for volunteers.
- Morale will be increased at the fire fighter rank. Those that are willing to do more will be compensated. The most productive employees will get paid more than their less productive counterparts.



- By strategically assigning a minimum of one Fire Fighter 1st Class on every shift in every fire house will eliminate the need for transporting between firehouses those members that are willing to act out of title. This also addresses employees taking their private vehicle while on duty.
- Union complaints of employees doing the work of promoted positions will be eliminated with increased compensation for the rank of Fire Fighter 1st Class.
- Refusal to act out of title will no longer be an option to anyone that is a Fire Fighter 1st Class.
- Increased training opportunities will lessen the reluctance to act out of title.
- By using members in their own assigned firehouse, the teamwork concept is maximized and a continuity of command is realized.

While the other alternative solutions have their own merits, the negatives are greater than the benefits that will be realized with solution number three. Hourly pay for all acting assignments would have a daily cost that would be presumably lower than a new rank designation, but would have extremely high start-up costs, and would not address the problem of finding willing volunteers.

The second possible solution, that of an organizational restructuring, is an intriguing alternative, but unworkable at this time. The type of cultural change that would be brought upon the department would take a lengthy time to properly implement, while the need for a solution to this problem is already overdue. Resistance would be difficult to overcome, and the department might end up replacing one problem with a larger, systemic problem. Still, it is healthy for an organization to look inward and assess the present climate and conditions. Today is not the

proper time or place for an organizational restructuring of the Milwaukee Fire Department.

Future examination might result in a different answer.

Who will be offended with the chosen path of action? Those fire fighters who have made a conscious decision to do the minimum that their job description requires. For the first time in the history of the Milwaukee Fire Department, employees that do more than others in the same rank will receive a higher level of compensation. There will be a reward system for the most valuable employees. Those that do the least will receive the least contractually allowed for their rank. Others that could be offended would be the “hard-line” union members that feel all employees are equal, and all employees should be paid equally.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The tasks needed for successful implementation are very dependant on the analysis and planning stages of any organizational change in culture (FEMA, 1996). Unanticipated difficulties are likely to occur at this stage, but avoidance of these problems is possible through effective communication and a shared vision. To create the shared vision and common direction, effective communication of planned changes, timetables and goals will create a sense of urgency that will assist in developing enabling mechanisms. The need to have people on the side of change will help insure success. In simplest terms, the organization must have a greater amount of forces that are willing to change than the amount of forces that are restraining the desired change. This force

field analysis is critical for proper implementation. Only when the shared vision for change outweighs those against change will the plan actually succeed.

The actual change that will be needed is actually quite small. It is the addition to the fire fighter job description the title and duties of a Fire Fighter 1st Class. This new designation will have positive implications on the daily operations of the Milwaukee Fire Department. Under this new title will be the requirements of those employees to act out of title, as either a driver or company officer, when needed to sustain the operational readiness of the department.

This problem has been recognized by senior management staff, middle managers, and the union represented rank and file. All sides have alluded to the need for such a position, and involved parties are ready to negotiate the required changes. When properly designed, those members that have been volunteering to act out of title will now be compensated for their productivity, even when it involves less than an entire twenty-four hour work shift. The concept is essentially pre-sold. At this time the driving forces outweigh the restraining forces.

The needed documentation will first come in the actual job description. The first requirement is changing the language to state that a Fire Fighter 1st Class will fulfill all of the assigned duties of a driver or company officer when needed to maintain the operational readiness of the Milwaukee Fire Department. Their duties are outlined in the other rank's job descriptions; all that is being altered is the removal of the section making acting out of title being a voluntary option to the employee. In addition, language will be needed to set a minimum time in employment with the Milwaukee Fire Department and the need to meet previous existing guidelines for an acting driver or company officer. This includes being accepted to drive the department's heavy fire vehicles. Of the 587 fire fighters on the department, over 300 presently meet these minimum requirements for the new position.

The labor contract must be amended to reflect the revised position. It is suggested that a yearly allowance be included to act as an enticement for present employees to assume the new position. The Milwaukee Fire Department's labor contract closely mirrors that of the Milwaukee Police Department. Police officers now receive a yearly payment of \$550.00 for "unanticipated duty allowance". This same amount should be offered, within the same concept of unanticipated duty. Only those that will assume all requirements of the new position will be able to receive this compensation. A formal agreement of understanding will be needed to be signed by employees willing to take the new title. Currently, over 300 fire fighters are periodically doing these duties for zero compensation. This driving force is over one third of the department, and under the proposed plan they will now be rewarded for doing these additional duties.

It should be made clear to the members that employees who become Fire Fighter 1st Class will be spread throughout the department to best utilize their talents. This could require the transferring of some employees. Assignments will be given on a seniority basis. The implementation is directly targeted at the lowest level of the organizational structure. There will be an increased benefit for those least paid. At the same time, the entire department benefits by increased efficiency and productivity. There should be a greater emphasis on the use and development of civil servants with specialist expertise in, or in-depth knowledge of, particular areas, complementing more generalist skills (Freeman, 1996). This will occur with the expansion of the rank. The Assistant Chief of the department is responsible for negotiating with the fire fighter's union. He will be required to meet with the representatives of the union to agree on clear, concise contract language.

Constant communication from the top about why the department is making this change is a necessity. Bottom-up input is desired to guarantee that this position best serves those most

affected by the change. Implementation should not be attempted until all parties agree on the scope and timing of the changes. The implementation of the changes is really a matter of formalizing an informal partnership. This plan recognizes and rewards those willing to do more.

Department administrative staff can write the specific language of the new position with input from labor side. The only significant change is the removal of the voluntary option from the fire fighter's present job description. Negotiations, because they parallel existing police contract language, should be accomplished in less than 30 days. Approval by city governmental agencies will add an additional 30 days. Because this is building on an already broad base of support, implementation from start of negotiations to utilizing the position of Fire Fighter 1st Class can be accomplished in 120 days.

The most important resource is a willing work force. To a large extent, that already exists. With compensation, those numbers should increase. The yearly cost to the department will vary depending on the number of employees opting for the new position. At \$550.00 per employee per year, the annual cost could range from \$165,000 for 300 Fire Fighter 1st Class to \$275,000 for 500 Fire Fighter 1st Class. Even at the higher end, this amounts to less than 4/10 of 1% of the total annual budget. This is offset by increased productivity and increased morale. This amount, when prorated for the remainder of the year, can be absorbed by the current department budget. In subsequent years, it will become a normal budget line item.

Additional training, specifically driver instruction, will be needed by a number of employees wishing to move into the new position. The Motor Vehicle Operator Instructor (MVOI) has within his normal schedule hours dedicated for this very same task. At present time, there is sufficient time available to properly train all members of the department that would request such instruction.

Any change will be met with challenges. The largest group will be those not willing to take on the added responsibilities and seeing fellow employees of the same rank receiving greater compensation. This idea of pay for performance is a new concept for the Milwaukee Fire Department. This change can be used as a motivational tool, bringing these employees up to the higher level of performance of their co-workers.

### **Developing a Performance Accountability Framework**

To evaluate any solution, it must be compared to the initial change goals. Has the change, in fact, met the goal of solving the problem caused by not having enough employees to act out of title? During this evaluation, the solution must also be compared to the symptoms. Have the symptoms, as outlined earlier, been reduced or eliminated as planned? If the answer is in the affirmative, the short-term success can be acknowledged. The more important evaluation is of the longer term. The job redesign must be measured as to how well established and institutionalized it has become. Is the new designated position accepted by the employees who have assumed the rank, and is the solution a workable change that improved the daily operations of the Milwaukee Fire Department?

Further confirmation of short-term success can be accomplished with employee satisfaction surveys and a polling of the middle managers to find if the problem has been alleviated. Are the employees who are now Fire Fighter 1st Class happy with their career choice and is the problem of finding personnel to work temporarily as a driver or officer being handled at the lowest level, eliminating the need for battalion chief intervention? Long term evaluation will include total costing of the solution. Have projections of cost been accurate and is the

compensation adequate to continue as a motivator of employees that may want to advance to this position in the future? This evaluation also serves as a tool for future change by identifying resistance factors that arose during this process.

### **Cost/Benefit Analysis**

It is the duty of the Milwaukee Fire Department to provide uninterrupted emergency services to the City of Milwaukee. By implementing this solution, the future of this commitment will be assured. The threat of placing a company out of service, even for a very short time, is unacceptable. That threat has been eliminated by having a adequate number of Fire Fighter 1st Class. A seamless flow of personnel will be seen on a battalion level, where it once was an unorganized, at times undirected, event. The logistical problems that were plaguing the battalion chief will have been eliminated, allowing these middle management employees to better use their time and energy toward true management tasks. The employees who have chosen this new position are now being rewarded for their commitment to the good of the department. Furthering the team concept and the empowerment of the lowest levels of employees will all have been realized. This will undoubtedly lead to improved performance levels in the fire fighting division of the Milwaukee Fire Department.

Will the benefits outweigh the costs. At face value, this plan has a greater annual operational cost. The total can not be measured against revenues, but instead must be measured against productivity, morale, and personal employee satisfaction. There will be a higher level of productivity for all battalion chiefs, the department's important middle managers. The morale of

the most productive employees will rise with the compensation for additional duties; personal satisfaction will increase with the feeling of being an integral part of the success of the department's mission. These factors point to the benefits far outweighing the cost of this job redesign.

To achieve success with any change is dependent on four important steps. Analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation of the change itself is critical for any altering of an organizational culture becoming institutionalized. Without this management model, failure might result. The change outlined is based on a need of the Milwaukee Fire Department, founded in symptoms of dissatisfaction in many levels of the organization. Clear identification of the problem enabled a plan to be developed that will make the necessary alterations and improvements to the way the department delivers its product to its customers. A fire department is all about providing service. The members of the Milwaukee Fire Department take great pride in the level and quality of services that they provide to their community. With the addition of the title of Fire Fighter 1st Class, the citizens of the City of Milwaukee will be assured of "first class performance" by the members of the Milwaukee Fire Department for years to come.



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## Appendix A

### Cost of Implementation of Chosen Strategy

“Job Design of Fire Fighter 1st Class”

| Action  | 300 Employees        |           | 500 Employees        |           |
|---|----------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|
|   | 1 <sup>st</sup> Year | Recurring | 1 <sup>st</sup> year | Recurring |
| Additional Compensation<br>\$550/employee per year.<br>(Actual Cost)                      | \$165,000            | \$165,000 | \$275,000            | \$275,000 |
| Driver training for those not<br>qualified. Training done on duty.<br>(Opportunity Cost)  | \$24,000             |           | \$40,000             |           |
| Officer training for those not<br>qualified. Training done on duty.<br>(Opportunity Cost) | \$48,000             |           | \$80,000             |           |
| Training Officers Pay<br>(Opportunity Cost)   | \$75,000             |           | \$100,000            |           |
| Total Costs   | \$312,000            | \$165,000 | \$595,000            | \$275,000 |

### **Benefits**

*Greater Productivity for Management and Labor*

*Higher Morale Levels*

*Greater Personal Employee Satisfaction*

### **Solution to the Problem**

## **Appendix B**

### **Timetable of Implementation**

1. Rewrite job description. Remove voluntary option to reflect duties of “Fire Fighter 1st Class”. This is a joint Labor/Management Activity.

Day 0 - 30

2. Contract revision negotiations to include title of “Fire Fighter 1st Class” and additional compensation clause.

Day 14 – 60

3. Communication to fire fighting division about proposed changes. All written communication will be approved by Labor /Management committee.

Day 28 – 60

4. Identify those employees deficient in training. Schedule and train those in need of driving and officer training.

Day 28 – 120

5. Submit contract and budget changes to city governmental agencies and receive proper approval.

Day 60 – 90

6. Evaluate efficiency of training schedule. Reallocate resources to insure training of all employees that have requested instruction.

Day 60 – 90

7. Perform test program in single battalion using volunteers. Evaluate and refine program.

Day 90 –120

8. Implement Change.

Day 120

9. Continued Evaluation, retune if necessary.

Day 120 – 240